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## TWO ALLEGORICAL PLAYS

By ANNIE DOUGLAS SEVERANCE

### "THE BETROTHAL"

#### THE SACRAMENT OF MATING

**I**N the plays and essays of M. Maeterlinck we have the record of the functioning of a strangely beautiful mind. All that he had written up to the beginning of the war bore the impress of his untrammelled thought, his yearning for truth, his vision of beauty in all things, and his wonder at the mysterious forces of life.

The stupendous crimes of Germany against his native Belgium and the world brought from him for the first time words of hatred, and during the last four years his writings have expressed only surprise and sadness that there were no heights lofty enough from which to see more than elemental manifestations of evil, injustice, tyranny, and suffering, and the duty of pitilessness, that there might be no more need for pity. With his new play "The Betrothal," which comes with the first days of peace, and is a profoundly beautiful and philosophic theory of life and love, we feel the survival of his old conviction that there needs but a little more courage, more love, more devotion to life, a little more eagerness,—one day to fling open wide the portals of joy, and the truth. His philosophy is too deeply grounded in goodness and love for even the titanic sway of evil forces to tear away its roots, and he reverts again to the belief that weakness and vice are on the surface, while strength, truth, and virtue lie underneath.

Like "The Bluebird," to which it is a sequel, "The Betrothal" takes the form

of a fairy tale. But in its inner meaning it is a drama of pure and exquisite symbolism, and celebrates the sacrament of mating. In an essay on *The Foretelling of the Future*, Maeterlinck has said, that which regards us, which is within our reach, that which is to unfold itself within the little sphere of years, a secretion of our spiritual organism that envelopes us in time . . . that, with all the external events relating to it, is probably recorded in that sphere. In any case it would be much more natural that it were so recorded than comprehensible that it were not. And it is this same conception of the unity of all things that makes the lover in "The Betrothal" quiescent in the selection of his true mate, while those who have gone before, as well as those who shall follow after, make the choice for him. The production of the play by Mr. Winthrop Ames is one of superlative beauty, that in light, color and form, as well as in imagery and suggestion, is a high achievement in material expression of the radiance of thought that underlies the drama.

The child Tyltyl of "The Bluebird" has grown to be a youth of seventeen, with a prophetic, adolescent beauty of which he is quite unconscious. The rosy strength of his young limbs and his vibrant joyousness tell of the gift of life received which he must presently in his turn, bestow. He dreams boyish dreams of the young girls of the village and the forest, until one night the Fairy Berylune comes to help him choose the great love of his life—for each man has but one, and if he misses it he wanders miserably over the earth, and

the search goes on with the great duty unfulfilled to all that are within him.

That the young girls may reveal to Tyltyl their true selves, the Fairy calls them to the woodcutter's cottage, first giving Tyltyl a magic sapphire, in the light of which he may escape from the falsehood of words, and live in the truth of thought, where every creature is at his best. But lovely as the bevy of maidens appear in the blue glow of the jewel, Tyltyl is not able to choose from among them his future mate.

There follows some further testing of the sapphire, after which Tyltyl,—together with the maidens, and a dumb, veiled figure who has joined them, but whom no one knows,—is taken to visit his ancestors, and the children who are to be born to him, that he may be guided by the two compelling forces in him, and be happy and safe:

Tyltyl is about to discover his relation to the infinite and eternal energy, of which we are all a part, and to perceive that his personal consciousness has sprung from a larger race consciousness. And in what follows philosophy moves hand in hand with some established facts of modern science. Biologists have taught us something of the power of ancestral ideas, traditions, prejudices, and knowledge as factors in the life of every individual, and have long discussed the application of the principles of heredity to raise physical and mental standards. Much education is necessary to make even a beginning in Eugenics, but this science has already emphasized the right of every child to be well born, that the race may progress upward through the survival of superior rather than inferior qualities.

So, with Tyltyl, and his loves, and the silent, unrecognized one, and accompanied by the symbolic figures of Light and Destiny which the sapphire, in reveal-

ing the true heart and essence of things, has made visible, we go to visit the ancestors, and the children who are waiting to be born.

The part of the Great Ancestor, the caveman, is played by Mr. Augustin Duncan, with a rugged vigor that makes his power superior to that of any other of the motley horde, which includes a beggar, a drunkard, and even a murderer. But though the ancestors may guide with their approval they may not themselves make the final selection. Only Tyltyl's unborn children, who can see farther and deeper than they, can show him the mother whom they have chosen.

In the Abode of the Children, under the lambent white of the Milky Way, the ether quivers with myriads of unknown stars, and a soft radiance enfolds the little amber-shadowed beings that troop out of the Beyond. There are six of Tyltyl's children, but it is the youngest and smallest of them all who recognizes her mother in the shrouded, voiceless image, and kisses her to life, crying: "Oh, Mummy, how lovely you are! It is I who have found you—I knew, I knew. How good it is, being together!" But Tyltyl has no recollection of her. And it is not until next morning when he wakes, and some travelers with their daughter enter the cottage, that he recognizes in the young girl the veiled presence of his dream. It is the little Joy of "The Blue-bird," grown up, and come back to him. Miss Sylvia Field, who takes the part, is, in the final love scene, a touching and appealing virginal figure. There is in her rapt, mute acceptance of the gift of love something of a supreme fusing of spirit and flesh, and her brow is touched by the holiness of future motherhood.

The symbolic figures of Light and Destiny accompany Tyltyl throughout his experiences. Miss Edith Wynne Matthi-



EDITH WYNNE MATTHISON AS *LIGHT* IN *THE BETROTHAL*

son embodies Light, and in her presence Destiny, that loomed up in the beginning of the play a shape of gigantic proportions, dwindles, until in the end it has become a babe in arms. For it is Maeterlinck's oft reiterated thought that fatality shrinks back before the soul that has more than once conquered her, and there is no destiny too dark to be overcome by wisdom.

### "DEAR BRUTUS"

#### A FANTASY IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF CONTENTMENT

WHERE M. Maeterlinck is mystical in his symbolism Sir James M. Barrie is whimsical, tender and wistful, and his symbols are wont to melt, dream-fashion, into conundrums, which may puzzle, but always charm. And again and again he has helped make us contented with the world we find ourselves in.

In his new play, "Dear Brutus," given in New York for the first time this season, he delicately hides from us in the title any clue to the moral he intends slowly to disclose in a setting of beauty and poetry, wit, wisdom, and fantasy. The drama has its suggestion in Shakespeare's assertion that we really control our own destinies upon the earth—though not very skilfully. "Men at some time are masters of their fate," says Cassius in "Julius Cæsar," "The fault, Dear Brutus, is in ourselves, not in our stars, that we are underlings." And when the last curtain falls we are convinced that the fault is indeed in ourselves, not perhaps by reason of any specific weakness, or error, but because the sum of what we are determines what we do. And if the often wished-for opportunity were given us to live life over again not one whit better would be our deeds unless we ourselves were different beings. So here is an end of some responsi-

bility, and every one may be as cheerful as he likes.

What could be a more whimsical setting for a Barrie moral than a magic forest whose shade on Midsummer Eve gives to all who enter it that chance in Life which he or she has missed! The genius of the fantasy is Lob,—better known to us as Puck, whom Shakespeare wishing to indicate a dull and stupid fellow, once called, "That Lob of Spirits." Answering his invitation all his friends who have met with disappointment and have blamed fate and not themselves for their condition, come, that he may play a trick on them.

Through the drawing-room windows is seen the magic wood, and into it flock the victims of mischief in search of the better thing that they have missed. There is a bevy of them, and their experiences differ, but the artist, Dearth, and his wife are the most important pair, and around them hangs all the philosophy of the play.

Being denied the daughter for whom he has always longed, Dearth has turned idler and waster. But in the wood his heart's desire comes in the form of a real Barrie child; and a real Barrie scene follows between the most lovable of fathers and the most adorable of daughters.

There is nothing more charming in all the realm of Barrie than the duologue between the father and the dream-child in the second act, so simply, naturally, and freshly played by Mr. William Gillette and Miss Helen Hayes.

Out of the wood at the end troop all the guests, and in Lob's drawing room slowly emerge from the spell of the enchantment. But they are surprised to find that though they have had their second chance they have not done very differently than before. Dearth and his wife are the only characters to gain a perma-

nent benefit from the visit to the forest. As the artist recovers from his bewilderment, great is his grief at losing his daughter. Husband and wife, however, are reconciled, and one hopes that the dream-child will some day come true.

In its idealism the relationship between father and child has been too exquisite and too essential to be denied material form. The dream-daughter has been too lovely in her potentialities to be thrust

back into the world of the might-have-been. And it is to be regretted that Barrie has not seen fit to give us a surer indication of her ultimate embodiment in actuality, rather than to stifle so radiant a possibility. But however we may feel that we have been adroitly baffled and thwarted in our wishes, the scene remains one of the finest in its suggestion that has been presented upon the American stage.

## CAPRI IN WAR TIME

By R. T.

If there are any spots on this earth which it is difficult to associate with war, surely Capri is one of them. To the imagination it must remain outside substantial horrors and continue the enchanted island which Shakespeare, as some think, chose as the scene of *The Tempest*; that "island in the Bay of Naples" where Ferdinand and Miranda met and loved, and Caliban was teased by the dainty Ariel. And indeed in essentials Capri retains her enchantment. But yesterday, in the midst of an August calm, Prospero with a wave of his wand "put the wild waters into a roar" and has now with a like magic allayed them. The news of the war seems far more like one of Ariel's tricks than any incidents in *The Tempest*. The natural beauties of the island are accentuated by the diminution of artificial accessories. The moon shines with exceptional brightness in spite of regulations as to lighting. The summer flowers bloom with the usual luxuriance and the pergolas are heavy with the grapes. There is the same crush at the corner of the Caprese Fenchurch Street, namely the piazza, where the people as-

semble for the arrival of the boat, now, indeed, only an evening occurrence and liable to interruption owing to the demand for tonnage. And the islanders are the same delightful people, true democrats as they have always been, courteous without servility, respectful to the respectable, and with a charming Christian pity towards the unfortunate. Here rank is neither despised nor exploited, and money, while profited by with pleasure, purchases no regard. Perhaps it is because the Capresi have never had an aristocracy that they are not angry with it nor obsequious to it when it comes from the Continent: perhaps because they have no native millionaires they are slightly cold towards wealth. Good nature and civility are all they give and all they expect. Excess of all kinds they affect not to notice, but beneath a courteous exterior they remain acutely critical. You may leave your doors open all day and all night and roam the island at all hours of the twenty-four with impunity, for the natives retain a primitive honesty, save only in the matter of growing fruit. But that also is a primitive failing, for was it not a matter of a fruit-laden